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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire on the topic of mainstreaming was submitted to educators in three schools in the Richmond, Virginia area and to three graduate classes at Virginia Commonwealth University. Of the 110 respondents, half were regular classroom teachers, and the other half included special education teachers, administrators, counselors, and other school personnel. Respondents were asked to give their opinions on the benefits and negative aspects of mainstreaming, their training in working with handicapped children and its adequacy, and suggestions on how mainstreaming can be improved. Types of handicaps with which the educators worked included learning disabilities; educable mental retardation; hearing, speech, and visual impairment; and physical handicaps. These educators perceived that the major benefit of mainstreaming was in its helping handicapped children to develop more social skills and better self concept. Respondents also felt that mainstreaming helps to remove the stigma from handicapped children and improves the tolerance and sensitivity of other children. A lack of proper training in mainstreaming strategies was cited as the major negative aspect. It was also felt that handicapped students were often improperly placed and that there was not sufficient time for planning and teaching. Respondents had received training mainly from inservice workshops, reading, discussions, and college courses. Fifty percent of them felt their training was adequate. Suggestions made for improving mainstreaming included more teacher training, smaller classes, more time for planning, and better placement for students. A copy of the questionnaire is appended. (JD)

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OVERVIEW OF MAINSTREAMING

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Overview of Mainstreaming

This descriptive study grew out of the realization by the researchers that, in certain instances, the concept of mainstreaming is not being accepted by many educators who are influencing factors in the handicapped child's educational environment.

In such a fast-paced impersonal age as ours countless educators feel that mainstreaming handicapped children was begun before school personnel were adequately prepared to plan for and teach these students in settings free from barriers to learning. In retrospect, Martin (1974) stated that..."The question of attitudes, fears, anxieties, and possible over rejections may face handicapped children, not first from their schoolmates but from the adults in the schools," (p. 2). He further stated that efforts to provide training and experiences for regular classroom teachers are not keeping pace with the efforts to mainstream (p. 3). It was also predicted that much of the training would not be responsive to "feeling and attitude issues." With such observations and predictions, it becomes necessary to refer to different authorities' definitions of mainstreaming because the definitions have different meanings to too many persons.

Beery (1972) stated that, "The concept of mainstreaming means a number of important things to us. It means creation of more individdualized, personalized programs in regular classroom settings for children who have difficulties..," (p. 6). In 1974, Birch described mainstreaming as "providing high-quality special education to exceptional children while they remain in regular classes for as much of the day as possible," (p. 2). Reynolds and Birch (1977) suggested

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that mainstreaming means that children who need special education are receiving it on a high-quality level and that it is being brought to them while they enjoy the personal and social advantages of life in regular school classes with all the other youngsters of their age and neighborhood. It means that high-quality regular education is going on, too, and not being interferred with for other pupils. Further, it means that the regular class teacher coordinates and is assisted by a staff of special educators, aides, and others. Together, they make up a team whose central concern is "top-flight instruction for exceptional and regular children alike" (p. 52).

These definitions of mainstreaming are but three of the myriad of definitions that have flooded the literature since the era of the 1970's.

As educators, we are too apt to think of mainstreaming as something that simply happens, something for which we are perhaps truly thankful, but often something that many of us accept as one of the by-products of legislative mandates, and for which we take neither credit nor responsibility.

However, a more recent definition by Turnball and Schultz (1979, p. 56) and discussed by Mandell and Fiscus (1981) describes mainstreaming as the social and instructional integration of handicapped students in regular classes. It is not just their physical presence. Social integration involves peer relationships, an opportunity to gain status and acceptance, and feeling comfortable and secure as a full member of the classroom group with the corresponding rights and responsibilities of membership. Instructional integration refers to

the handicapped student being involved in the curriculum of the classroom. It means that appropriate instructional strategies are used to teach the student through individual, small group, and large group activities (p. 95).

If the needs of the handicapped child are to be met in the regular classroom, certain demands are inevitably being made on the teacher, the administration and other resources within the educational system. Thus, it is understandable that such sweeping effects of Public Law 94-142 has become a controversial issue.

However, the modern theory of education proposes that the school is a place where all children are educated by means of work and play which are necessary for them. In spite of this, it has been stated that the integration of handicapped children in schools is made difficult by the fact that the group with which the regular teacher must work is made up of children with a great variety of intelligence, social and behavioral backgrounds. Some are more perceptive than others and will, therefore, be quick to effectively participate in the day-by-day classroom activities. Others are having a much more difficult time understanding the tasks that they are required to complete, as well as understanding their relationships to the group. Some of the children exhibit behavior such as even-temper, self-control, respect for education, and responsibility for group well-being. In contrast, other handicapped students exhibit anti-social behavior, whether withdrawn or aggressive types. The latter group of students present most difficult problems to the teacher who attempts to help them develop academically and socially.

With these unforseen educational and behavioral backgrounds of experiences that are so representative of handicapped children, it is no wonder that teachers have developed a variety of attitudes towards their placements in regular classroom settings.

Background of Study

Over a period of time, we have been including topics on mainstreaming in our graduate and undergraduate courses. It has been our intent to help our students to become better prepared to work with children who have handicapping conditions.

Our undergraduate students continue to have apprehensions about working with mainstreamed students but seem willing to try. They are filled with the hope and high expectations of the novice. On the other hand, our graduate students are experienced classroom teachers, many of whom work everyday with children who have handicapping conditions. It is this group that is able to evaluate the effectiveness of mainstreaming.

During class discussions with the graduate students we often asked the following questions: (1) What are some of the benefits of mainstreaming? (2) What are some of the problems with mainstreaming? (3) How can mainstreaming be improved? The answers to these questions were remarkably similar from class to class. An auto mechanics teacher told about having educable mentally retarded and learning disabled students placed in his classes because the school counselors believed this was a course in which the students could have success. The teacher was upset because the students did not have reading skills adequate enough to read the repair manuals and shop orders, and he did

not know how or have the time to teach reading. A home economics teacher complained that several students were mainstreamed into her sewing classes. They could not comprehend or remember the intrications involved in threading a machine or following a pattern. She did not have the time nor inclination to give them extra help.

As we listened to these numerous complaints, we began to wonder just how pervasive these feelings of frustration were among teachers. We also wondered what we as teacher educators could do about the problem.

We decided to use the questions that we asked our classes and the responses that the students gave to construct a questionnaire. We would give the questionnaire to teachers in diverse settings in an attempt to discover the nature and extent of teachers' concerns about mainstreaming. (See Appendix)

The questionnaire was in two parts. Part I asked for demographic data such as school level, position, sex, age, and teaching experience. We planned to use this data to determine if a teacher's sex, age, or teaching experience was a determinant factor in his/her responses to working with mainstreamed children. We also wanted to know if a teacher's grade level affected his responses. This part of our research remains incomplete at this time. We are reviewing the results of the first part. We are presenting the results of the second part which we feel have greater implications.

Part II asked questions about mainstreaming and included several possible answers. We planned to use this information to determine the concerns teachers have about mainstreaming and to formulate some implications. The questions were:

1. What do you see as the benefits of "mainstreaming" children with handicapping conditions into regular classrooms?
2. What are the negative aspects of mainstreaming?
3. Have you had training in working with children with handicapping conditions?
4. Was your training adequate?
5. How can mainstreaming be improved?

Results of Study

We distributed 150 surveys to educators in three schools in the Richmond area and to three graduate classes at V.C.U. We received 110 responses for a 73% return. Following are the data we gathered from Part I:

(1) Position

50% were regular classroom teachers; 35% were special education teachers; 3% were administrators; 3% were counselors; and 9% held other positions. These include librarians, nursing educators, church school administrators, etc.

(2) School Level

35% were elementary school school educators; 47% were middle school educators; 12% were secondary school educators, and 6% worked in other educational institutions. These included child care centers, hospitals, etc.

(3) Sex

21% were men and 79% were women.

(4) Age

45% were between the ages of 20 and 30; 45% were from 30 to 40; and 10% were over 40.

(5) Years of Experience

35% had 1-5 years of experience; 40% had 5-10 years; 20% had 10-15 years; and 5% had over 20 years.

In rank order is a frequency of distribution of the leading handicapping conditions with whom the educators worked. Respondents could check as many items as desired.

1. Learning disabled - 50
2. Emotionally disturbed - 43
3. Educable mentally retarded - 36
4. Speech impaired - 28
5. Hard of hearing and deaf - 18
6. Visually impaired - 17
7. Physically handicapped - 16
8. Other - 15

Following are the data from Part II.

Respondents could check as many items as desired. We are reporting the items with the highest ratings.

1. The major benefits from mainstreaming are:
   a. Helps handicapped children to develop more social skills - 75
   b. Helps handicapped children to have better self-concepts - 69, and removes stigma from handicapped children - 69

c. Makes regular classroom children more tolerant and sensitive - 64

Items With Lowest Response

1. Encourages the teacher to plan more carefully
2. Make teachers more responsive

2. The major negative aspects of mainstreaming are:

a. Lack of teacher training - 89

b. Improper placement of handicapped students - 57

c. Lack of enough time to plan for students - 54

d. Lack of enough time to teach students - 51

Items With Lowest Response

1. Inadequate communication with parents
2. Not enough administrative support
3. Having to care for the personal needs of the handicapped

3. The types of training the teachers had were:

a. Inservice workshops - 64, and reading books and articles - 64

b. Discussions - 60

c. College courses - 56

4. 50% of the respondents felt their training was adequate; and 50% felt it was inadequate.

5. The major ways that mainstreaming can be improved are:

a. More teacher training - 79

b. Smaller classes - 68

c. More time for planning - 51

d. Better placement for students - 50

Items With Lowest Responses

1. More materials
2. Teacher aides
3. Better communications

Some of the comments written on the questionnaires are:

"Regular teachers usually have very negative attitudes toward handicapped children."

"Regular classroom teachers should be required to take courses on handicapping conditions to work along with special education teachers.

"Special children should be counted twice. If you have 5, they should count as 10."

"More time is needed for communication between regular education teacher and special education teacher."

"Should use special education teachers as resource people who float from room to room helping the special child."

"Definite need for workshops and inservice courses for regular teachers."

"Allowing the handicapped student to select the mainstreamed class and teacher makes a smoother transition."

"Change needed in attitudes of administrators toward the handicapped beginning with the superintendent."

"Reorganize the college curriculum to include more methods courses on how to teach handicapped students in the content areas."

"Special education teachers should teach special education kids."

Implications

Now that the era of the 1970's have passed, and educators have become adjusted to some of the changes mandated by Public Law 94-142, one must expect that the 1980's will continue as landmark years directed toward effective planning for handicapped students.

The results of this investigation reflect change processes that must take place on two education levels.

I. Teacher Training Institutions

1. Teacher preparation programs in the future must become oriented towards a comprehensive approach for training teachers to work with children who have various academic, behavioral, and physical handicapping conditions.
2. Teacher training programs must place a greater emphasis on techniques and strategies that make use of the principles of behavioral psychology. This training will enable the teacher to help children develop more appropriate social behavior.
3. Teacher training institutions should be in the forefront in educational research that deals with the most effective strategies of intervention and remediation so they relate to the education of children with learning and behavioral problems, as well as the attitudes of school personnel towards these issues.

II. The School Level

1. Administrators must become well-informed about Public Law 94-142 and the requirements, so that the most effective programming can be planned for the special child in regular classroom settings.
2. If regular classroom teachers have not had courses and/or experiences with exceptinal children, workshops, seminars, and in-service training must be conducted with emphasis on effective training.
3. Regular classroom student loads must be lightened comparable to the number of handicapped students in the classroom.
4. Support services from specialist must be more available to the regular classroom teacher with mainstreaming children.

Summary

A current issue in education today is "teacher stress." It seems to us that one of the contributors to teachers' feelings of stress could be the fact that they are required to perform a job that they feel they are inadequately prepared to do. An overwhelming number of our respondents cited a lack of teacher training as the number one negative aspect of mainstreaming and said that mainstreaming can be improved by more teacher training. Several of our respondents cited the need for training in specific areas: Science, Math, History, etc.

While others saw a definite need for changes in teacher attitudes. Perhaps, as teachers gain confidence in their abilities to teach children who are different, their attitudes will improve.

It seems to us that teacher trainers and school administrators must immediately address these concerns expressed by teachers.

D. Reed
A. Hill

Survey On Mainstreaming

PART I - Check all that apply:

1. Position:
   - Classroom Teacher ____
   - Special Education Teacher ____
   - Administrator ____
   - Counselor ____
   - Curriculum Specialist ____
   - Psychologist ____
   - Sociologist ____

   Other _____

2. School:
   - Elementary School ____
     - K-3 ____
     - 4-7 ____
   - Middle School ____
   - Secondary School ____

   Other _____

3. Sex and Age:
   - Male ____
   - Female ____
   - 20-25 ____
   - 25-30 ____
   - 30-35 ____
   - 35-40 ____
   - Over 40 ____

4. Years of Experience in Schools:
   - 1-5 ____
   - 5-10 ____
   - 10-15 ____
   - 15-20 ____
   - Over 40 ____

5. Do you teach or have regular contact with students with handicapping conditions?
   Yes _____ No _____

   What are the handicapping conditions?
   - Learning disabled _____
   - Emotionally disturbed _____
   - Educable mentally retarded _____
   - Speech impaired _____
   - Visually imparied _____
   - Hard of hearing and deaf _____
   - Physically handicapped _____
   - Other health impaired (heart condition, tuberculosis, asthma, epilepsy, etc.) _____

   Other conditions _____

PART II - Check all that apply:

1. What do you see as the benefits of "mainstreaming" children with handicapping conditions into regular classrooms?

   a. Removes stigma from handicapped children _____
   b. Makes regular classroom children more tolerant and sensitive _____
   c. Helps handicapped children to have better self-concepts _____
   d. Helps handicapped children to develop more social skills _____
   e. Helps handicapped children to make more academic progress _____
   f. Helps "regular" children to develop more social skills _____
   h. Makes the teacher more tolerant and sensitive _____
   i. Encourages the teacher to plan more carefully _____
   j. Encourages the teacher to individualize instruction _____

   k. Other benefits _____

   _____

2. What are the negative aspects of mainstreaming?

   a. Lack of teacher training _____
   b. Improper placement of handicapped students _____
   c. Lack of enough time to plan for handicapped students _____
   d. Lack of enough time to teach handicapp students _____
   e. Lack of additional materials _____
   f. Having to care for the personal needs of handicapped students _____
   g. Not enough information about the student's handicapping condition _____
   h. Inadequate communication between the classroom teacher and the special education teacher _____
   i. Not enough administrative support _____
   j. Too much extra work for the classroom teacher _____
   k. Inadequate communication with parents _____

   l. Other negative aspects _____

   _____

   _____

3. Have you had training in working with children with handicapping conditions?

   College courses _____
   Inservice workshops _____
   Observations of other teachers _____
   Discussions _____
   Books and articles _____
   Consultations _____

   Other training _____

   _____

Was your training adequate?

Yes _____ No _____

4. How can "mainstreaming" be improved?

a. More teacher training _____
b. Smaller classes _____
c. More materials _____
d. Better placement of students _____
e. The use of teacher aides _____
f. Better communication among the teacher, the special education teacher, the administration, and the parents _____
g. More time for planning _____

h. Other suggestions for improvement _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Comments:

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